

# Short Stories

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## THE UNEXPECTED

## The Story of a Wayside Inn

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S NOW, everywhere snow; under our horses' feet, in each fold of our garments, crowding thick and fast through the dark air. We had passed through hours of this, and very pleasant was the ruddy light gleaming from the windows in jovial invitation, warming even the white courtyard.

"Wake from your abstraction, Niobe," called Aurigny, leaning from his saddle to inspect the little peasant who rested his head against the wall. "Is this a night to indulge in tears outdoors? Come, is this the will-o'-the-wisp inn we have been hunting?"

The boy turned to look at us.

"This is the inn of Maître Jacques, monsieur," he answered resentfully.

Aurigny slipped down and plunged through the ankle-deep snow to the door. D'Antin, more thoughtful, waited for me. And not unnecessarily; already numb with cold, the jar of dismounting sent keen waves of pain through my wounded arm and left me glad to lean on him as the courtyard melted into dancing flashes of red and blue.

"My fault, Lucien," came his voice in acute self-reproach.

"It is nothing," I gasped amusedly. "Consider the other's probable sensations, *très cher*. There, it is over!"

As the courtyard came back to its presumably normal appearance, I met the little peasant's wide startled eyes fixed on mine.

"Monsieur will go in?" he said eagerly, "Monsieur suffers — I will open the door —"

The giddiness still held me, his sober face wavered with the wavering light.

"Why were you crying?" I asked whimsically.

"Come in, come in," D'Antin urged.

"Why?" I persisted.

"Monsieur —" the boy stammered.

The inn door flew briskly open again.

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"You will stay out there, perhaps?" cried Aurigny from the threshold, the landlord's round face at his shoulder. "You are then frozen? *Ah ça*, Mortemart, you are ill?"

"No," I returned, "only interested. Why ——"

But D'Antin interrupted by sweeping me unceremoniously into the house.

"Come, you," he directed the boy. "Lucien, you are the most obstinate!"

The square firelit hall was bewilderingly comfortable; I sank into the first chair some one pushed forward and leaned my head against the high back. Too weary to speak myself, I yet experienced a sense of pleasure in the vigorous and improper remarks Aurigny was flinging at our host. True, it was hardly the man's fault that his inn was not three miles farther south, as we had believed, nor could he be blamed for the weather; but, what will you? We were too tired to be logical.

It was during a lull that the volubly apologetic landlord managed finally to make himself clear.

"Messieurs will excuse that my so diminutive inn has only one parlor. I am desolated that it should be so, but the lady is already here and I will place a screen. There is no other room which is possible ——"

"What are you talking about?" Aurigny demanded, pausing on his way to the hearth. "Do you mean that a lady has already taken possession of the only habitable room in this place of misery?"

The little host spread out his hands helplessly.

"I am in despair, monsieur; she waits for a gentleman who does not arrive. She is very quiet and will disturb no one. Moreover, with a screen ——"

Aurigny cut him off ruthlessly.

"What have I to do with your screens? Go present Madame with our compliments and ask if she will permit us to dine in her apartment. Your hall has a thousand drafts, there is more wind than outdoors. Why do you stand there like that?"

"Perhaps he is wondering what the lady will think," I suggested.

"Do I care?" Aurigny exclaimed, wheeling on me. "Does it matter, so one escapes these gales of ice and acquires supper?"

"There is always a woman," D'Antin observed, gazing after the landlord with an expression of mild disgust.

"Perhaps she is interesting," I said listlessly.

"No woman is interesting enough to amuse me to-night," he retorted. "I would rather go to bed than talk to Aspasia, and this woman is probably stupid."

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"Do not talk to her, then; I shall be merely civil," Aurigny remarked impatiently.

A gust of wind struck the house and set the candle flames flickering wildly. Glancing around the hall, my eyes fell on the little peasant by the door and I nodded him to approach.

Involuntarily his smile responded to mine as he came to my side.

"Why did you cry?" I asked.

"Monsieur, it was a folly," he stammered shyly.

"It is always a folly to weep," commented D'Antin from the fireplace.

"You are growing old," I said tolerantly. "*Mon enfant*, disregard him and tell me."

And he did, in his curious tripping patois.

"Monsieur, it is that the good Curé has here in our village a school. Yes, a school as if we were rich bourgeois instead of poor peasants; we learn to read, to write, we hear even tales of Monsieur César — but yes."

"Seditious Curé," murmured Aurigny *sotto voce*.

"And each day, monsieur, before we go home, there is for everyone a bowl of soup of a goodness most wonderful. For that soup each scholar brings something, a carrot, an onion, a handful of dried peas; and those whose parents are wealthy — such as Pierre who keeps the forge — they pay a few sous each month to buy meat. Monsieur comprehends?"

"Perfectly."

"Ah, but I, monsieur, only I of all the village can bring nothing. My uncle declares it is a foolishness. They laugh at me, those others; they call me that which is not to be borne. To-day Pierrot of the forge said I drank that soup which was not mine, and we fought rolling on the floor until the Curé stopped us. For that I cried, out there — because I will not go back."

"*Tiens*, and my tutor was obliged to call on heaven and earth and all the château to get me to my books," came from Aurigny.

A ponderous step on the stair announced our returning host.

"Finish holding your *chambre ardente*, Beausourire," D'Antin said, turning that way expectantly.

I looked into the large black eyes fixed on mine.

"Suppose you gave your Curé enough *sous* to last many months; would that arrange itself?" I inquired.

"Monsieur —"

"If messieurs will give themselves the trouble to ascend," declared Maître Jacques, his fat face radiant as he reached the last step, "madame will be pleased to receive them."



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I put a couple of louis in the small brown fist and rose.

"So, bid Pierrot of the forge observe that your tuition is paid in advance."

"Oh," he gasped, stupefied, "monsieur, all this gold ——"

Smiling, I crossed to the others. But he ran after me.

"I may say Monsieur Beausourire gave it me?" he asked joyously, "so they will not believe that I stole it, monsieur."

The nickname he had caught came very drolly and we all three laughed.

"Yes, you may say that," I answered, and we began the ascent.

It seemed an incredibly long flight of stairs; before we gained the top the teasing giddiness had returned and I was quite willing to let the others enter before me.

At the first glance the room appeared to be empty; it was a moment before we perceived a diminutive and adorable lady seated in an armchair before the fire, her dimpled chin in the palm of her hand and the firelight gleaming on her golden curls as she gazed at the glowing logs.

"Madame," Aurigny ventured, taking a step forward.

She rose at once and faced us with wide gray eyes, her red lips parted in evident expectation of our next move. It occurred to me suddenly and forcibly that it was extremely bad taste to force our society upon a lady — or rather a young girl — traveling alone.

But it was too late for retreat, and the undaunted Aurigny rushed ahead.

"Madame, we offer you a thousand apologies for this intrusion, we are overcome with your goodness. Indeed we presume so for only because this gentleman is seriously wounded, as you see; for myself ——" an eloquent gesture implied his willingness to remain somewhere in the vicinity of the courtyard.

It was too bad, and exactly like him. I felt myself flushing as her startled gaze turned to me.

"It will give me pleasure to share whatever accommodations the inn affords, monsieur, with the soldiers who fight for France," she answered in a clear, childishly sweet voice. "Will you not be seated?"

"Permit us first to introduce ourselves, madame," he said, completely reassured. "I am François de Clermont-Aurigny, let me present the Marquis D'Antin and Vicomte de Mortemart."

To each of us in turn she swept a delicious courtesy with an utterly delightful smile, and the entrance of Maître Jacques and his assistant formed a welcome interlude. But she responded to the introduction with no hint of her own identity.

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"Madame will dine now also?" questioned our host, depositing a pile of plates on the table and beaming at us paternally.

"Madame will not desolate us by refusing," said Aurigny with warmth.

"Or we must return to the hall in despair," added D'Antin.

Her mischievous glance flashed across them to rest on me; I contributed my quota with an irrepressible smile.

"The hall is very cold, madame."

The laughter in the gray eyes deepened and she offered her hand to Aurigny with pretty dignity.

"If you are sure I will not fatigue you ——"

"Madame?"

"Then you may take me to dinner, Monsieur le Chevalier."

Aurigny almost dropped the little fingers.

"You know me, madame?" he exclaimed, amazed.

"I have heard of you," was the demure reply.

We took our places at the round table, D'Antin and Aurigny calmly appropriating the seats next to her and relegating me to the opposite side; a bit of selfishness which did not grieve me, for I was just ill enough to prefer watching her to speech.

The dinner proceeded gayly. Gradually the room lost its unsteadiness and left me able to follow connectedly the conversation; a conversation amusing enough in its airily erratic flight from subject to subject.

But I was not allowed to remain silent very long; in a lull the lady leaned toward me.

"You suffer, monsieur?" she questioned. "You do not eat——"

"I thank you, madame; it is nothing, indeed," I answered with gratitude. Somehow our glances caught and held each other for an instant.

"In other words, he has a rapier cut from wrist to shoulder," volunteered Aurigny, joyously *mal-à-propos*. "And as Condé does not care to punish his favorite officer for duelling, it is assumed that he was wounded in the last battle."

I bit my lip as I looked at D'Antin; we had learned from experience the futility of expecting Aurigny to keep a secret. Madame grew quite pale.

"That is terrible, monsieur," she exclaimed. "To ride in this storm so hurt! Yet you noticed," she broke off abruptly and her color rushed vividly back.

"It is nothing indeed," I repeated, my mind vainly ranging all possible conclusions of the sentence. *What* had I noticed?

"It is not very cold," D'Antin remarked idiotically.

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But his effort was wasted; Aurigny pursued the subject without heeding him.

"It is bad traveling, of course, but if Mortemart had stayed in camp everyone would have known he was around unhurt the day after the battle. Now all will be confused by his trip to Paris. Fancy that Condé himself arranged all this to evade his own edict, madame; he is so absurdly fond of this gentleman whom he nick-names Beausourire. We are all carrying letters as a pretext, but I do not imagine there is much in them." He laughed cheerfully, then accidentally met my eyes and stopped short.

My expression was probably unamiable; I know madame looked from him to me and her dark eyebrows went up a trifle.

"You are sorry he told me?" she inquired, deceptively gentle.

"Not on my own account, madame," I replied seriously. "I have no liking for secrets. But my commanding officer has risked much censure in shielding me and I could never forgive myself if it became public. He has enemies in Paris."

"You believe a woman cannot keep silence like you men," she suggested, just barbing the remark with a fleeting glance at Aurigny.

He winced, and D'Antin openly smiled. I hastened to particularize.

"Certainly I do not, madame. I never meant to question your ability, only to beg that you exercise it. The story was told you without reserve — may I ask you to consider it a confidence?"

The gray eyes answered mine in all gravity even while the dimples rippled the smoothness of her cheek.

"I promise," she answered, nodding her blond head. "Only you must tell me the rest, messieurs."

"Aurigny can do that best," D'Antin said unkindly.

"Very well, I will," Aurigny retorted with alacrity. "You see, madame, D'Antin is betrothed to a lady whose residence is not many miles from our last camp, and he slipped away to see her the night after the battle. Unfortunately he stayed too long with mademoiselle and a dear enemy of his discovered his absence. At least he thought D'Antin was missing and wanted to search his tent to make sure. Mortemart would not let him; result, the General's edict broken by moonlight."

"You three seem to be fond of each other," she commented.

"We are," I assured her hastily. D'Antin was staring at Aurigny in speechless rage.

"Was the other one wounded also?" was her next query.

"Half killed," Aurigny smiled. "Beausourire is very thorough. He will not ride to Paris for many a day."

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I fancied there was a shade of reproach in her gaze and my own fell rather uncomfortably.

In the silence which followed we heard the door below close sharply, then my little peasant's voice floated up.

"Maître Jacques, Maître Jacques, it is that many riders are approaching the village; I run to tell you so that you may be ready."

"Good, good; you are a boy of heart, Jean Marie," came the landlord's stately tones.

"Ah, but I would ask you then, mon maître, to say only to Monsieur Beausourire that the Curé declares the gold is too much — I will be a man before it is used."

D'Antin's amused laugh drowned the reply.

"*Bon marché*, Lucien," he said. "The price of knowledge is sometimes — more."

Madame set down her cup with the air of someone suddenly recalled to recollection, and rising, walked back to her armchair by the fire.

"Gentlemen," she said with nervous abruptness, "I have heard your confession; will you listen to mine?"

"Yours, madame?" Aurigny exclaimed.

She turned her face from the lamplight.

"Mine. You are so far away —"

We gathered around the fireplace in surprised interest, a hundred hitherto ignored questions springing to life. Why was she alone in this obscure inn; and why, knowing us, did she conceal her own identity?

I tried to catch her eyes again as we took our places, but she spoke with her gaze fixed on the leaping flames.

"You are of the *vielle noblesse*, you three, and the Prince de Condé's officers; what would you do with a spy?"

The question could not have been more unexpected.

"Hang him," Aurigny replied nonchalantly, regarding her in appreciative admiration.

"And if it were a woman?"

"Does that lessen the crime?" I asked involuntarily.

"No, but may it not the consequences, monsieur?"

Her tone chilled me; it was D'Antin who answered.

"Surely no one would wish to hang a woman; the idea is absurd."

"Then you would help such a one to escape? You would do that?"

"Madame —"



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She leaned forward eagerly, her small white fingers closing on the arms of her chair.

"Those soldiers that are coming seek me. I—I believed myself safe until that boy spoke. Messieurs, I am a Frenchwoman, but I am on my way now to the Prince of Orange with information that could alter this whole war. I—listen."

The long clear echo of a bugle drifted to us across the noise of the storm.

"It is impossible," D'Antin gasped.

"Why?" she flashed. "Have not men and women done this before? No one knows; you would never have known if I had not been caught in this trap. If they capture me I will drag out my life in prison. My courage has failed; help me, gentlemen."

She rose with the last word, looking from one to another with wide frightened eyes, and D'Antin and Aurigny rose with her. Only I remained motionless, suddenly conscious that I was ill and giddy, and that my arm throbbed unbearably.

"What can we do?" Aurigny asked blankly.

Her gesture of appeal was eloquent.

"Hide me, anywhere. Oh, do I know what to do?"

The two men turned to me simultaneously.

"Lucien, suggest something," D'Antin exclaimed. "Madame——"

"Must be saved," Aurigny completed, afire. "Beausourire, you who are so ingenious, why do you wait? Madame ——"

I steadied myself with an effort.

"And afterward?" I demanded. "Hush, Aurigny; there is still time. Afterward, will you go on to William of Orange, madame?"

"Monsieur?" she faltered, turning from my gaze.

"Madame, that army you would betray is of our friends; forgive me if I insist."

"We are wasting time," D'Antin protested feverishly.

"I ask madame's promise to use none of her knowledge, Edmond; can I do less?"

"To bargain with a woman in distress!" cried Aurigny.

"And the men asleep out there in our camp?"

"They are *men*."

I shook my head.

"It will not do," I said reluctantly. "You know, you must know, that I am anxious as either of you to save madame; but the cost would not be ours. If madame will not give her word to carry her errand no farther, I must ride back to Condé and warn

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him that his plans are discovered. I leave you free, of course, you can undoubtedly rescue madame and go on to Paris without me."

"You could not ride the first ten miles," D'Antin exclaimed. "Lucien, you are mad!"

"Do not be too certain; I should reach the camp."

"It would be easier to tell the men who are coming," suggested Aurigny, exasperated.

"It is most kind of you to propose that," I retorted. "It is so exactly what I would wish to do. Perhaps you would like my assurance that I will not repeat your share in all this; I had not thought you would find it necessary, but ——"

We stood looking at each other, all three nearer a quarrel than we had ever been before. It was the lady who interposed, turning toward us a little hurriedly.

"Messieurs, you go too fast. Monsieur de Mortemart, would you indeed attempt that ride, in this storm?"

I averted my eyes from the limpid gray ones.

"You leave me no choice, madame."

"Pardon, monsieur; you might stay here," she courtesied to me demurely. "France and I permit."

"Madame?"

"Monsieur, you are so credulous."

Was this our detected and terrified spy, this laughing girl who faced us across the hearth? We stared at her in stupefied silence, gradually realizing the truth.

"You were playing with us?" Aurigny stammered. "You did not mean that?"

"*Vive la France, et le Roi, et Monsieur le Général de Condé.* Are you convinced?" Her low laugh rang through the room.

"How stupid we were!" cried D'Antin joyously. "Madame, how could we believe that ugly thing?"

"You did believe it," she declared. "In another moment you would have quarreled furiously."

"You laugh," Aurigny protested, completely himself again, "but we tried to aid you, madame, in your imaginary difficulties."

"I am overcome with gratitude — to you and Monsieur D'Antin." She sank into her chair and raised her fan to shield her face from the glare of the fire. "No one else was so unwise."

Aurigny glanced at me maliciously; D'Antin, more generous, rushed to my defense.

"But madame, say rather that Mortemart was a veritable Ulysses to resist the glamour in which we were caught. Since this was only a jest, let us concede his point of view."

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"Have I not said he was wise?" she queried.

"Scarcely wise, madame," I said, irritated into reply. "If such an affair had become known, I would have been in exactly the same position as D'Antin and Aurigny. We would have released you while knowing you carried dangerous information."

"You would have warned the General," she suggested. I shrugged my shoulders.

"Yes; it was our duty to prevent the necessity for the warning."

"You think the Cardinal would consider it so?" she asked reflectively.

"The Cardinal?" Aurigny echoed, amused. "What does this concern him, madame?"

She closed the fan abruptly and leaned forward, the firelight playing on her earnest face.

"Listen," she directed.

In our interest and excitement the riders had come unnoticed. We all heard now the loud cheerful voices, the bustle and running below, and a breath of icy wind proclaimed the open door.

"Well?" Aurigny questioned, not unnaturally. "Since they have nothing to do with us?"

"And if they have? Ah, you would have helped me, it is too much! Messieurs, suppose I worked *for* France, not against; suppose I served, not William of Orange, but Cardinal Mazarin. Would it be safe then, what you have said to me?"

"Madame, you are playing again," D'Antin cried.

She turned to him swiftly.

"Monsieur, you know as well as I whether the country is honey-combed with the Cardinal's spies, whether he hates the Prince de Condé and will use any means against him. Go from here before those below see you; I can say that I could not learn your names. Only do not wait."

There was no time for reflection; she was already at the door.

"Go?" Aurigny protested, "Madame, if you are serious, how can we go? The way is blocked."

"How did you mean to save me?" she demanded, her hand on the latch. "Go that way, messieurs."

"*Par exemple!*" ejaculated D'Antin helplessly.

Aurigny went to the door in mechanical search for a means of locking it; finding none, he pushed the heavy table across and came back.

"It is too absurd," he said. "but perhaps we had better try the window. Mazarin is — Mazarin."

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The window flew open with a crash and the two leaned out eagerly. Aurigny gave an exclamation of pleasure.

"No one on this side, and scarcely ten feet down. Yes, a boy — Beausourire, come here; it is your peasant," he whistled sharply. "Here, boy, look up."

"Monsieur called?" came the pattering voice.

"If I called! Do you want gold, a handful of gold? Can you bring our horses, a ladder?"

"Monsieur?"

"Oh, the stupidity? I say ——"

I quietly drew him aside and looked out myself; under the touch of the cold snow filled air my fever and giddiness fell away.

"Can you understand who is speaking to you, Jean Marie?" I asked.

"Yes, oh yes; it is Monsieur Beausourire," he answered delightedly.

"Are there many men downstairs, *mon ami*?"

"Monsieur, perhaps a dozen, and one officer all glittering who commands."

I surveyed the distant outhouses and sheds which loomed as huge snowdrifts.

"Jean Marie," I directed, "go now to the stable and tell the man who received our horses to bring them here to us. Tell him that if he does this unnoticed, we will give him as many louis as we gave you. Can you do this?"

"But yes, monsieur."

"Then make haste; I will watch for you."

"It will be the others who watch," D'Antin commented. "You cannot manage it, Lucien; still one can try," he stopped short as some one tried the door, then knocked imperiously.

Aurigny made an impulsive movement toward the window, but checked himself with an expressive shrug; the inn door had been opened and the courtyard was flooded with light. We stared at each other blankly, while the knock was repeated with increased force.

"One might as well answer," D'Antin said hesitatingly.

Aurigny looked again at the courtyard, then yielded ungraciously.

"What do you want?" he called roughly.

"What do I want?" cried an irate voice. "I want to enter, of course. By what right do you absorb the one habitable room of a public inn? Open the door, monsieur." A vigorous push set the table slipping back.

I sat down in the nearest chair, wordless before the last surprise.



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There was only one such voice; without the slightest doubt our visitor was the senior officer of our regiment, who had left the camp on the evening before.

"Why do you not open the door?" was repeated in growing indignation.

"Monsieur, the table is before it," Aurigny stammered lucidly.

"What?"

"Wait but an instant, monsieur," D'Antin interposed struggling between laughter and relief as he dragged aside the barricade. "Lucien, was ever so mad an evening?"

I had no opportunity to answer; the door swung back violently, revealing on the threshold Captain Armagnac, and at his side our late companion.

"Gentlemen, you have a pretty way of welcoming fellow-travelers," he snapped, at the last point of irritation. "What is the reason for these preparations; did you expect a siege? If I had not known who was here, there might have resulted an unpleasantness."

No one replied; our three pairs of eyes were fixed on the lady's demure countenance in utter and dazed astonishment.

"Can you not speak?" he demanded. "Why do you look at my daughter as if she were a Flemish man-at-arms?"

"Your daughter?" Aurigny gasped.

"Certainly, my daughter, whom I am bringing from Paris.

Pray what is remarkable in the fact, Monsieur le Chevalier?"

"Indeed you must indulge exiles who have seen only a camp for weeks," I said, seeing Aurigny for once at a loss. "Monsieur, we are desolated at this reception, but we expected very different visitors. Mademoiselle will easily comprehend, and perhaps accept our apologies."

She did not look at me, but her father relaxed into a smile to meet mine.

"Oh, I understand," he responded more genially. "When one has dined — Esmée, my dear, the Vicomte de Mortemart, the Marquis D'Antin, and the Chevalier de Clermont-Aurigny."

To each she swept her charming courtesy, accompanied by a dimpling smile and a glance from beneath her long lashes; no one could have believed that we had met before.

"And now," added the Captain, "if you gentlemen do not insist on an open window ——"

D'Antin closed it very gently. Mademoiselle crossed sedately to the fireplace and took her own chair, while her father com-

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menced an account of how a careless driver had separated her carriage from the rest of the party.

"Since she arrived at the inn first, it is surprising that you did not meet," he concluded innocently.

It was not until an hour later that the Captain left the room and we could speak to her. And the very wealth of remark left us hesitating where to choose, until she herself spoke first.

"I am grieved at your duplicity, messieurs, in giving my father the impression that we had not met before. Would it not have been better to say frankly that we awaited him together?"

"Mademoiselle, it was you who said nothing!" Aurigny cried indignantly.

"Did you expect me to claim what you did not acknowledge?" she retorted.

"You forget that we were in doubt whether we should greet you as an emissary of the Prince of Orange or a secret agent of the Cardinal," D'Antin reminded her.

She raised her eyebrows, the gray eyes meeting his mockingly.

"Very true, Monsieur le Marquis; and yet one girl contrived to entertain you for an hour, although she was neither Aspasia nor at all likely to prove interesting. It is most sad that wherever you go, you find a woman."

Wordless enlightenment dawned on us.

"So our bad quarter of an hour was a punishment for rudeness," I said. "Accept all my compliments, mademoiselle; the farce is admiration."

She colored, but lifted her small head defiantly.

"You are offended; admit at least it was deserved."

"Without doubt." D'Antin assured her, in a swift return of gaiety. "We have only one excuse — we had not seen you, mademoiselle. But be generous; concede justice done, and tell me I may venture to see you more peacefully in that home to which the Captain is taking you. I may come, mademoiselle?"

He leaned toward her coaxingly; D'Antin is more than good to look at. I turned away with an altogether unreasonable movement of anger, but her voice of velvet arrested me as she replied.

"I shall be enchanted, monsieur — if you bring your fiancée. Dénise is my dearest friend."

He flushed to the temples, then bowed gravely and drew back. It was perhaps time he remembered Dénise.

As he retreated Aurigny advanced, strong in the knowledge that as yet he was hampered by no fiancée.

"Mademoiselle, you have afforded us a charming adventure,"

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he said with airy grace. "May I hope that to-night is only the first step toward the friendship I desire so earnestly; that I may see you at the Château with madame your mother?"

She smiled at him cordially.

"I shall receive you with pleasure and safety, monsieur; as yet I have no secrets to guard."

In spite of my own approaching fate I bit my lip to preserve seriousness. It was a mild return for the numberless confidences he had joyously betrayed, and I confess to satisfaction.

"You now, Lucien," D'Antin murmured at my ear, in unkind expectation.

But as I took the step forward there came the sound of hurrying feet on the stair and a little figure appeared at the open door.

"It is that Louis is weary of waiting, monsieur, and begs that gold, since the horses are there," announced Jean Marie, breathlessly.

Aurigny uttered something inarticulate. Mademoiselle's eyes flashed across us, then she laughed softly and held out her hand to the child.

"Go give Louis his gold, messieurs," she directed. "Monsieur de Mortemart is ill and should not face the night air; moreover he alone suggested that I might be interesting, and he has not yet told me if he was right."

"Mademoiselle," Aurigny exclaimed in reproach.

She waved mirthful dismissal and beckoned the dazzled Jean Marie to her side.

"*Mon enfant*, who gave you the right to the Curé's soup?" she questioned.

"Monsieur Beausourire, mademoiselle," he answered promptly.

"Who was suffering himself, this Monsieur Beausourire, yet noticed a little peasant who cried. I think I will imitate the Prince de Condé, Jean Marie, and forget to quarrel with him."

Jean Marie had one little hand, I bent over the other she extended as the luminous gray eyes smiled at me.

"Mademoiselle, if I can find no words ——"

Perhaps you do not need them."

The Captain's foot was on the stair.

"And you will receive me at the Château, mademoiselle, as you do the others?"

Her smile deepened mischievously.

"No, monsieur, I will receive you quite differently," she replied.

And on the whole I think she did.